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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

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SUBJECT: GEORGIA INTENDS TO CONTINUE WORKING IN JCC

REF: TBILISI 1994

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Mark X. Perry for reasons 1.4(b&d).

Summary

1. (C) Georgian officials tell us they plan to continue working in the Joint Control Commission (JCC) on the South Ossetia conflict, even as they push for other mechanisms that they believe would be more effective. Although the South Ossetians torpedoed a planned JCC meeting in Tbilisi August 9-10, citing alleged security concerns, all sides have once again agreed in principle to a meeting in Tbilisi, which is now expected to occur in the second half of September. End Summary

See You in September

2. (C) OSCE Political Advisor Gantcho Gantchev told us August 13 that following consultations the previous week involving Russian Special Envoy Yuri Popov, there was a "common agreement" to hold a JCC meeting in Tbilisi in the second half of September. Gantchev said he was hopeful the meeting would take place. He noted that the South Ossetian side had indicated that it would expect "international security guarantees," but he thought that this ambiguous request was most likely an effort by the South Ossetians to refute suggestions that they had backed down on their earlier refusal to travel to Tbilisi. Gantchev said he also did not entirely understand comments by Georgian State Minister for Conflict Resolution, mentioning in the context of the JCC the need for Russia to cooperate with the investigation of the August 6 missile incident, but he did not expect this to be a major obstacle to a JCC meeting.

Georgia Pursuing JCC and Other Tracks

3. (C) Georgia's newly appointed JCC co-chair, Deputy State Minister for Conflict Resolution Dimitri Manjavidze, confirmed to us August 13 Georgia's continued "interest, readiness, and commitment" to work in the JCC, as well as other formats. Reviewing the events of the previous week, Manjavidze said he had told Popov and Russian Security Council representative Kuzin in a private dinner August 6 that Georgia would continue working in the JCC, although he added on a more general level that he thought the JCC mechanism was not working, and it would be worth it to consider moving at least some parts of the negotiation process to the "Authorized Delegations of the Sides" format. Popov replied that he had never refused to work in the Authorized Delegations, but his priority was the JCC. Manjavidze also shared with Popov his thoughts on the Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF), noting that some of its activities -- such as the establishment of new checkpoints -- were in fact more positive than Georgian officials would sometimes admit.

14. (C) Manjavidze said Popov then traveled to Tskhinvali for meetings August 7, where he somewhat mis-characterized his discussion with Manjavidze, including in a press release suggesting Georgia agreed with Russia on the importance of the JCC. To clear up the issue, Manjavidze said, State Minister Bakradze had recently disseminated the correspondence from these negotiations to the diplomatic corps. In a raucous August 8 meeting of the "Union of Elders of South Ossetia and North Ossetia," separatist leader Kokoity announced that South Ossetian JCC co-chair Boris Chochiev would not attend the meeting in Tbilisi, where a planned terrorist attack certainly awaited him (reftel). (Note: The correspondence shows that the Georgians did in fact promise diplomatic immunity to the South Ossetian delegation, in accordance with the JCC terms of reference. End Note.) Manjavidze told us that, after this low point, Popov did manage to get all sides to agree in principle to a Tbilisi meeting. Manjavidze said Georgia agreed, but Bakradze also raised the pending need for Russia to cooperate with the investigation of the missile incident (septels). Manjavidze stressed that Georgia had not made this an "immediate condition" for the meeting, but took the opportunity to stress the importance of the investigation and the possibility that future developments in it could affect the JCC. He said Georgia "did not refuse" Popov's proposed timing of the second half of September, but he thought final agreement on such details would have to wait for Popov to complete a monthlong vacation.

Comment

15. (C) While the Georgians have expressed some concerns and comments in connection with the next JCC, Manjavidze stressed repeatedly to us that Georgia sees the JCC process as a part

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of its plan for the future. It was the South Ossetians who refused to attend the meeting planned for August 9-10, after several rounds in which they agreed to go and then pulled back. Both sides have now endorsed a September JCC in principle, but also left themselves a little wiggle room. This seemingly endless process of talks about whether to have talks will likely resume after the summer holidays. We will continue to stress to the Georgians that they should be careful not to leave themselves open to charges of failing to work in the JCC format, even as they pursue the use of other (perhaps more effective) formats to negotiate a peaceful resolution of the conflict.
PERRY